



NEWS RELEASE



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California and the Yurok Tribe Sign Agreement that Allows Tribe to Provide Culturally Appropriate Child Welfare Services to Tribal Children

SACRAMENTO – California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Director John Wagner and Yurok Tribal Chairman Thomas O'Rourke Sr. today announced they have signed a child welfare agreement that allows the Yurok Tribe to draw down federal funding to provide child welfare services to tribal members.

This agreement, the second of its kind in California, provides for the Yurok Tribe's foster care and adoption assistance benefits to be handled internally by the Tribe. That responsibility had fallen to Humboldt and Del Norte counties, where the Tribe is primarily located. Services will transfer to the Tribe once a plan is adopted and programs are in place.

"This is a monumental achievement for the welfare of the children and families of this Tribe," said Director Wagner. "We are committed to working with all interested California tribes so they can offer the most culturally appropriate services to their tribal members."

"This agreement puts the Tribe on the path to ensure our families stay whole," said Chairman O'Rourke Sr. "We look forward to working with the state to finish this process. This initiative is one example of the Tribe's commitment to working with the State of California."

The Yurok Tribe is now required to develop a Tribal Child Welfare Services Plan in consultation with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) prior to commencement of funding for the program. This agreement provides for the pass through to the Tribe of Title IV-E federal funds for the provision of foster care and adoption assistance payments to children under the Yurok Tribe's jurisdiction. Once the plan is adopted, CDSS will provide general oversight.

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The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was intended to protect the best interests of American Indian children and to promote the stability and security of American Indian tribes and families. The federal law was passed to remedy the problem of disproportionately large numbers of American Indian children being placed in foster care. The law recognized "that there is no resource ... more vital to the continued existence and integrity of Indian Tribes than their children." Further, the ICWA codifies a strong preference for American Indian children across the nation to be placed in American Indian homes and for their child welfare cases to be heard in Tribal courts.

The Yurok Tribe is the largest American Indian Tribe in California, with nearly 5,500 enrolled members. At 63,035 acres, the Yurok Reservation is the size of many counties. It is located in Humboldt and Del Norte counties, with some areas crossing Oregon's border. The first such agreement in California was signed three years ago with the Karuk Tribe of California, which is located within Siskiyou County.

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